

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8661

INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 20060

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: EXTREMIST PENETRATION OF THE LABOR PARTY: MUCH

ADO ABOUT VERY LITTLE

REF: (A) LONDON 18207 (B) LONDON A-810, NOVEMBER 23,  
1975

SUMMARY. EXTREME LEFT-WING PENETRATION OF THE LABOR PARTY HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL AND MEDIA ATTENTION IN RECENT WEEKS. IN ADDITION TO THE TRADITIONAL "REDS-UNDER-THE-BED" SCARE CHARGES FROM VARIOUS CONSERVATIVE SOURCES (REF. A), LEADING LABOR PARTY FIGURES HAVE ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM IN PUBLIC FORA AND THE NEWS MEDIA HAVE DEVOTED SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF TIME AND SPACE TO THE SUBJECT. THE MORE ALARMIST AND IRRESPONSIBLE TORY ALLEGATIONS ASIDE, THERE IS A CONSENSUS AMONG OBSERVERS THAT EXTREMIST ELEMENTS, GENERALLY CHARACTERIZED AS "TROTSKYITE", HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY ACTIVE IN SOMELOCAL LEVEL LABOR PARTY ORGANIZATIONS. THESE ELEMENTS ARE THOUGHT TO BE ACTIVE IN SOME 25 TO 30 CONSTITUENCY LABOR PARTIES (CLP), BUT HAVE NOT YET GAINED UNDISPUTED CONTROL OF ANY OF THEM. NEVERTHELESS, THE LABOR PARTY IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL THREAT AND WILL PROBABLY MOVE SHORTLY TO COUNTER THE TROTS. AT THIS POINT WE BELIEVE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PENETRATION PROBLEM HAS GREATLY EXAGGERATED ITS REAL SIGNIFICANCE, BUT IT MAY ALSO HAVE STIMULATED THE LABOR PARTY TO MOVE  
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MORE DECISIVELY THAN OTHERWISE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE CASE.

END SUMMARY.

1. ALLEGATIONS OF EXTREMIST PENETRATION ARE NOT NEW TO THE LABOR PARTY. IT HAS BEEN AN ISSUE SINCE THE PARTY'S FOUNDATION (REF. B), AND ONE ON WHICH WE HAVE OCCASIONALLY REPORTED (SEE ESPECIALLY LONDON 15494, 16165 AND A-960, ALL OF 1975). AS FOUR OR FIVE MODERATE LABOR MPS HAVE FOUND THEIR POSITIONS CHALLENGED BY THEIR CLPS, THE ISSUE HAS BECOME MORE NEWSWORTHY AND A RENEWED CAUSE FOR CONCERN WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY. THIS CABLE WILL EXAMINE THE ISSUE OF PENETRATION EFFORTS BY EXTREMIST ELEMENTS POPULARLY CHARACTERIZED AS TROTSKYITE, IGNORING THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL, HOME GROWN LEFT-WING, AS WELL AS THE MORE SUBJECTIVE AND EXAGGERATED CONSERVATIVE ALLEGATIONS ABOUT SITTING MPS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT MINISTERS.

2. THE MEDIA, STIMULATED BY THE RECENT DIFFICULTIES OF SEVERAL LONG-SERVING, RIGHT-WING LABOR MPS, INCLUDING MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT REG PRENTICE, HAVE IN RECENT WEEKS DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO REPORTS OF EXTREME MARXIST PENETRATION OF CLPS. THE TIMES RAN A FIVE PART SERIES ON THE PHENOMENON, AND ONE OF THE TV NETWORKS FEATURED THE TROTSKYITES ON A RECENT PROGRAM PROBING EFFORTS TO CHANGE LABOR PARTY RULES SO AS TO DENY SITTING MPS THE ALMOST AUTOMATIC RIGHT OF RENOMINATION. OTHER PRESS AND BROADCAST MEDIA HAVE PROMINENTLY COVERED THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE MPS FACING OUSTER BY THEIR CLPS, AS WELL AS THE TORY TOCSINS. THE CONTINUING SAGA OF LEFT-WING (BUT NOT TROTSKYITE) INFLUENCE ON THE LABOR PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC) HAS ALSO BEEN AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF NEWS. OVER THE PAST WEEKEND, FORMER PRIME MINISTER HAROLD WILSON AND PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY RON HAYWARD EACH ADDRESSED THE EXTREMIST PROBLEM CALLING FOR MEASURES TO COUNTER THE PENETRATION EFFORTS. WILSON, DISCUSSING CLP CHALLENGES TO SITTING MPS, REFERRED TO "BEDSITTER INFILTRATORS" AND THE NEED FOR RULES CHANGES TO RESTRICT THE POWER OF CLPS TO DENY RENOMINATION TO MPS WHO HAVE LOYALLY SUPPORTED LABOR GOVERNMENTS AND THE PARTY'S MANIFESTO AIMS.

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SPECIFICALLY, HE ASKED THAT ALL MEMBERS OF CLPS, NOT JUST THE MORE ACTIVIST DELEGATES, BE ALLOWED TO VOTE ON WITHDRAWAL OF NOMINATIONS. HAYWARD ECHOED THESE SENTIMENTS IN A DIFFERENT FORUM, ASSERTING THAT THE PARTY SHOULD NOT TOLERATE A SITUATION WHICH PERMITS POLITICAL ACTIVISTS TO JOIN A CLP AND, IN A VERY SHORT TIME, REACH POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY AND PROCEED TO DESTROY THE GOOD WILL BUILT UP BY LOYAL MPS.

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3. LAST YEAR, ACTING ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE NEC, THE PARTY'S NATIONAL ORGANIZER, REG UNDERHILL, UNDERTOOK A COMPLETE STUDY OF ALLEGATIONS OF EXTREMIST PENETRATION. AFTER SURVEYING VIRTUALLY EVERY ONE OF THE PARTY'S 635 CLPS AND UNCOVERING SOME THERETOFORE PRIVATE DOCUMENTS, THE REPORT WAS TURNED OVER TO THE NEC WHICH FOR NEARLY 12 MONTHS HAS TAKEN NO ACTION. THE REPORT HAS NOT BEEN RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC, BUT PARTY OFFICIALS, INCLUDING UNDERHILL, HAVE DISCUSSED ITS CONTENTS WITH EMBOFFS AND, EVIDENTLY, JOURNALISTS. WE HAVE ALSO DISCUSSED THE PENETRATION ISSUE WITH LABOR MPS OF VARIOUS IDEOLOGICAL COLORATION AND WITH CONSTITUENCY PARTY OFFICIALS, AND ALL INDICATE THAT UNDERHILL'S PRINCIPAL FINDINGS, DESCRIBED BELOW, WERE ACCURATE. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO CORRECTIVE ACTION, ALL OUR SOURCES HAVE STRESSED THE NEED TO AVOID A "PURGE" SUCH AS THOSE WHICH HAVE DEBILITATED THE PARTY IN THE PAST AND CLAIMED AS VICTIMS SUCH LABOR LUMINARIES AS STAFFORD CRIPPS, NYE BEVIN AND MICHAEL FOOT.

4. FROM WHAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ASCERTAIN, UNDERHILL'S REPORT CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

-- THERE IS AN ORGANIZED EFFORT BY A GROUP OF

YOUNG, AGGRESSIVE POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, IDENTIFIED AS THE  
"MILITANT" FACTION, HAVING THE AVOWED AIM OF GAINING  
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CONTROL OF CLPS;

-- THE "MILITANTS", MADE UP LARGELY OF STUDENTS OR  
FORMER STUDENTS, HAVE A RADICAL MARXIST ORIENTATION AND  
APPEAR TO BE DIRECTED BY AN OLDER MARXIST LONG-IDENTIFIED  
WITH TROTSKYITE MOVEMENTS AND WHO EDITS THE MILITANT, A  
WEEKLY NEWSPAPER;

-- THIS FACTION IS ACTIVE IN FROM 20 TO 30 CLPS  
AND HAS CLAIMED TO HAVE TAKEN OVER PRENTICE'S CLP  
(UNDERHILL DISPUTES THIS CLAIM, BUT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT  
THEY ARE ONE OF THE MAJOR FORCES IN THAT CLP);

-- THE "MILITANTS" ARE MOST ACTIVE IN CLPS  
LOCATED NEAR UNIVERSITIES AND POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTIONS;

-- WEAK OR MORIBUND CLPS ARE THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE  
TO "MILITANT" PENETRATION EFFORTS, AND NATION-WIDE THERE  
ARE TOO MANY CLPS WHICH CAN BE SO CHARACTERIZED;

-- THE CAPACITY OF THE "MILITANTS" TO CAUSE  
TROUBLE FOR SITTING MPS IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO AN MP'S  
RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS CLP, AND THOSE PROVIDING RELATIVELY  
POOR SERVICE OR OTHERWISE AT ODDS WITH THEIR CLPS ARE  
THE MOST VULNERABLE; AND

-- ALTHOUGH THE "MILITANTS" DO NOT REPRESENT AN  
IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE PARTY. THE SITUATION IS SERIOUS  
ENOUGH TO WARRANT CHANGES IN PARTY RULES AND A SPECIAL  
EFFORT TO REVITALIZE WEAK CLPS.

5. WE UNDERSTAND FROM GENERAL SECRETARY HAYWARD THAT HE,  
UNDERHILL AND OTHERS WILL MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO GET  
THE NEC TO ACT ON THE UNDERHILL REPORT AT ITS DECEMBER 15  
MEETING. HAYWARD SUGGESTED THAT CALLAGHAN IS AWARE OF  
THIS INITIATIVE AND SUPPORTS IT (INDEED, HE MAY HAVE  
INSPIRED IT). AT THIS POINT, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE  
NEC WILL MOVE. ITS RESPONSE, WE WOULD GUESS, WILL BE  
MODERATE AND CONSISTENT WITH THE LOW LEVEL OF THE THREAT.  
THE MILITANTS WILL NOT BE PURGED; RATHER, WE WOULD EXPECT  
THAT CHANGES IN THE RULES MAKING CARPETBAGGING MORE  
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DIFFICULT WILL BE RECOMMENDED, THA ECIAL PROGRAM TO  
INVIGORATE THE WEAKER CLPS WILL BE APPROVED AND THAT  
TRADE UNIONS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO HAVE THEIR LOCAL  
BRANCH ORGANIZATIONS BECOME MORE ACTIVE IN CLP  
ACTIVITIES. IF ADOPTED, SUCH A PROGRAM WOULD SEEM TO  
BE AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

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## Message Attributes

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